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Good Teaching is Good Teaching

EDITORIAL

Recent literature has noted that the distinction between distance education and technologically-supported traditional education has become somewhat blurred with the increased use of technology to facilitate learning in higher education. As the title of this issue of DEOSNEWS suggests, "good teaching is good teaching" regardless of the delivery method. This paper describes a Faculty Initiative project and presents a set of principles and practices developed by faculty from three universities who were involved in designing distance education programs. Principles were developed in five categories addressing issues related to the design and development of a quality educational experience.

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GOOD TEACHING IS GOOD TEACHING: AN EMERGING SET OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in instructional technologies and a renewed interest in changing the dynamics of an instructional event continue to influence the way we design and develop educational systems. Changes are being called for in the way we think about the role of both instructor and student. Within both the distance education and general education framework, new standards are being defined based on a student-centered curriculum, increased interactive learning, integration of technology into the educational system, and collaborative study activities. Core to these changes is an examination of the fundamental principles of what constitutes quality instructional interaction. Without a firm

understanding of these principles, decisions are made based on the merits of the technology or methodologies without consideration of the long-term and potential benefit to the student.

The development of "guiding principles" was one outcome of the Innovations in Distance Education (IDE) project, launched in 1995 with a grant from the AT&T Foundation. This three-year initiative was designed to help faculty at Penn State and Lincoln and Cheyney universities create a supportive institutional culture in which the possibilities of distance education could be realized. The project consisted of two principle components: the Faculty Initiative and the Distance Education Policy Symposia. The Faculty Initiative's culminating work was the faculty-determined _Emerging Set of Guiding Principles and Practices_, a set of principles and practices that would provide a philosophical foundation for the design and development of educational programming at a distance.

The Faculty Initiative

Twelve of Penn State's academic colleges and its library system along with Cheyney and Lincoln Universities, two of Pennsylvania's historically Black institutions, contributed to the Faculty Initiative. During each year of the three-year project, funding was awarded to several of the participating academic units. These grants were intended to provide faculty selected by their administrative heads with time and resources needed to fully engage in the project. To ground their deliberations regarding issues of instructional design and pedagogy in experience, the faculty were also expected to prepare specific courses or non-credit programs for delivery via distance education. Faculty funded by the IDE project not only had access to support staff involved in distance education, but they also had access to University resources and an opportunity to implement an individualized professional development plan, meet regularly with other faculty across academic disciplines, and attend national or international distance education conferences.

One of the primary outcomes of the IDE project was a set of guiding principles to be developed and articulated by faculty deeply immersed in the process of designing and developing a distance education program. It was soon evident that the resulting principles and practices apply to the resident instruction as well as the distance

education delivery model. The shared mantra of the faculty and staff during the development of this document was that "good teaching is good teaching!" The techniques and artistry of the craft may change depending on the constraints of time and place, but the desired student goal, a marked and measurable change in behavior, were clearly the same. _An Emerging Set of Guiding Principles and Practices for the Design and Development of Distance Education_, is less about distance education and more about what makes for an effective educational experience, regardless of where or when it is delivered.

It was agreed early in the project that the scope of the principles and practices would be limited to the design and development stages of the instructional design process. Although delivery and evaluation issues are addressed in the resulting document, the document is directed mainly toward the design and development phase. The charge of the Faculty Initiative component of the IDE project was to create a document that would serve as a foundation to other individuals interested in designing and developing academic content to students not bound to a geographic location and/or committed to meeting at a specific time.

What follows is a description of the process used to develop the guiding principles and practices and the results of the collective thinking about effective teaching and learning environments. The word "emerging" is purposefully inserted into the title of this document to identify it as a work in progress, continually informed and refined by new experiences and research.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE AND CONTRIBUTE

As part of the grant from the AT&T foundation for the Innovations in Distance Education project, a group of faculty from Penn State, Lincoln, and Cheyney University were selected to participate in the "Faculty Initiative" component of the project. Each faculty, at a designated point in the three-year span of the project, would dedicate time and resources to the design and development of a new or existing distance education program. This "funded-year faculty" model enabled staff and support services to concentrate on the needs of a select number, typically between four to seven faculty, each year. During their funded-year, additional resources were made available to faculty in the form of IDE "project teams" to support their distance education initiative. These

project support teams drew upon distributed resources already available throughout the institution, as well as the expertise of staff members working in Continuing and Distance Education and the Center for Academic Computing. The IDE project enabled these teams to work together in a focused way over an extended period, to better coordinate and concentrate their efforts toward a common goal -- development of new or enhanced credit courses and noncredit programs to be delivered at a distance.

Concurrently with the funded-year faculty activities, all IDE faculty met regularly to discuss issues and identify principles and practices of distance education. The Guiding Principles and Practices Colloquium meetings were established to encourage discussion and reflection among faculty, support team members, other Continuing and Distance Education personnel, and IDE project administrators on the issues, concerns, and strategies for developing an effective distance education program. Out of these discussions resulted the document, _An Emerging Set of Guiding Principles and Practices for the Design and Development of Distance Education_ that reflects the experiences of Penn State, Lincoln, and Cheyney faculty and staff who participated in the IDE Faculty Initiative.

Professional development opportunities were also designed as part of the IDE project. Faculty and staff participated in a rich assortment of pedagogical, technological, and research activities related to distance education. Faculty discussion groups, research-based forums, teleconferences, brown bag seminars and full-day workshops were organized to inform, stimulate dialog, and form a community of thinkers about distance education.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Given the design of the project and the need to structure the activities of nineteen faculty and associated staff around defining a common set of principles, a process evolved that addressed the development and refinement of this outcome. This process is described in order to inform the interpretation of the results.

* Identify an initial set of categories to frame the discussion;

* Establish "Category Teams" consisting of IDE faculty and staff to focus on defining the depth and breadth of each category;

* Organize a series of IDE Guiding Principles and Practices colloquia, led by faculty, designed to present the preliminary results of the "Category Teams";

* Conduct an IDE Guiding Principles and Practices retreat for faculty and staff to further enrich and expand the thinking around each category;

* Develop a draft of the Guiding Principles and Practices document for review and limited distribution;

* Solicit suggestions and modify the draft document through continued discussions, presentations, and conference settings;

* Structure the third-year faculty projects around the application of the Guiding Principles and Practices to their projects; and

* Produce a "final" version of the Guiding Principles and Practices document.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES CATEGORIES DEFINED

The following five categories address the three major components of an educational event and the support and technology-based issues related to conducting that event. The educational component categories are: Learning Goals and Content Presentation, Interactions, and Assessment and Measurement. The enabling categories are Instructional Media and Tools and Learner Support and Services.

Category I. Learning Goals and Content Presentation

The identification and articulation of the learning goals and objectives provides the foundation for the instructional design, development, delivery, and assessment of an educational event. These defined goals serve as the contract between the instructor and student, defining what is to be taught and what is to be learned. Communicating these learning goals is a crucial step in assuring an effective learning experience. Although the planned learning goals need not be altered for delivery via distance

education, new instructional design strategies may need to be considered to support the intended outcomes.

1.1 Principle. Learning goals should be defined as part of the instructional design plan. Once defined, they should be publicly available and communicated clearly and explicitly to the student in whatever manner suits the design model -- in print, face to face, or via a Web site.

1.2 Principle. Specific instructional activities should be directed toward providing learners with the necessary skills, knowledge, or experiences to meet the goals and objectives of the course. The course content should be sequenced and structured in order to enable learners to achieve the goals articulated in the learning outcomes.

1.3 Principle. Evaluation of student performance should be directed toward the measurement and assessment of the defined learning goals, just as these goals provide the basis for the selection of instructional learning strategies.

1.4 Principle. Instructional design and development support should include a wide range of services for faculty in the creation and preparation of instructional materials for delivery via distance education.

Category II. Interactions

When learners interact with one another, with an instructor, and with ideas, new information is acquired, interpreted, and made meaningful. Such interactions form the foundation of a community of learners. If students feel they are part of a community of learners, they are more apt to be motivated to seek solutions to their problems and to succeed. The challenge for distance educators is to design into the instructional situation strategies and techniques for establishing and maintaining "learning communities" among learners separated by space and/or time.

2.1 Principle. Effective learning environments should involve frequent and meaningful interactions among the learners, the instructional materials, and between the learner and the instructor. When instructional technologies are employed as part of the educational program, the interface between the learner and technology should also be considered.

2.2 Principle. Social interactions between learners enrich the learning community and should be encouraged and supported throughout the instructional design of educational programs.

2.3 Principle. The use of electronic communications technologies should be considered as a tool for creating and maintaining the learning communities for learners at a distance. These technologies may also support active and collaborative learning activities.

2.4 Principle. Distance education programs should employ creative solutions to fulfill the objectives traditionally achieved via residency requirements: interaction among faculty, students, and peers beyond direct instruction; access to advising and academic support services and resources; and socialization in the field of study.

2.5 Principle. To help reduce barriers to establishing social relationships, participants should be afforded the opportunity to build confidence and competence with the distance education paradigm and supporting technologies.

Category III. Assessment and Measurement

Assessment and measurement serve valuable purposes for both instructors and students because they provide information on learner progress, they measure achievement of learning goals, and they provide learners with benchmarks for monitoring their progress and adjusting their learning strategies. In a distance education model, assessment and measurement become even more critical in the absence of the face-to-face interactions which enable teachers to gauge student response, feedback, and progress toward goals. Creativity in design and approach to assessment and measurement strategies can serve both the instructor and the learner in the distance education setting.

3.1 Principle. Assessment instruments and activities should be congruent with the learning goals and should be consistent with the skills required of the learner throughout the distance education program.

3.2 Principle. Assessment and measurement strategies should be employed as integral parts of the learning experience -- enabling learners to assess their progress, to identify areas for review, and to reestablish immediate learning or lesson goals.

3.3 Principle. Assessment and measurement strategies should accommodate the special needs, characteristics, and situations of the distance learner.

3.4 Principle. Distance learners should be provided ample opportunities and accessible methods for providing feedback on the instructional design of the distance education program.

Category IV. Instructional Media and Tools

Instructional media and supporting software tools (i.e., MS Word, Minitab, e-mail, etc.) have enabled distance educators to address the two primary barriers to distance education: the learner's feeling of remoteness and isolation, and the time it takes to complete an instructional transaction. Although the promise of new and emerging technologies continues to be realized, sound instructional design practices need to be to maintain the proper focus on the educational process. The media selection and application process is driven by a thorough analysis of the role of the instructional media and supporting tools in achieving the learning goals, an understanding of the impact of the use of technology, and careful consideration of the characteristics of the distance learner. All technology used adds a cost to the system. To the learner, this cost is reflected in increased access costs to technology. To the delivery system, this cost is seen in increased learner support needs. To the instructor, these costs may be increased development and delivery resources.

4.1 Principle. The selection and use of instructional media and tools should be based upon their ability to support the pre-determined learning goals and objectives of the learning program.

4.2 Principle. The selection of instructional media and tools should reflect their accessibility to learners. A distance education program should incorporate a technology base that is appropriate for the widest range of students within that program's target audience.

4.3 Principle. The selection of instructional media and tools should reflect a thorough analysis and understanding of the "added value" of that technology.

4.4 Principle. Users of a distance learning system should be adequately prepared and supported in order to maximize the capabilities of instructional media and tools.

4.5 Principle. The design of programs delivered via distance education should reflect the diversity of potential learners. Distance learners bring varied social and cultural backgrounds and diverse experiences to a distance learning situation. The unique contexts in which learners live and work may influence the way they think about and use instructional media.

4.6 Principle. Distance education program design should use the instructional design approach to guide the selection and application of media and tools. A wide range of technologies, both electronic and non-electronic, may be used to deliver content, support interactions, and provide student access to instructional and administrative resources in a distance learning program.

4.7 Principle. Contingency strategies should be planned that will enable a quick recovery from technology-related interruptions when the instructional design model relies on some component of electronic technology for delivery.

Category V. Learner Support Systems and Services

Among the most important components in the design of distance education programs are those that establish the organizational and administrative infrastructures to ensure that such programs can be efficiently and effectively developed, managed, and executed. The learner support systems and services required to establish and maintain an effective distance education experience must be as complete, as responsive, and as customer-oriented as those provided for the on-campus learner. In most cases, these services may be the only link the learner has with the institution apart from the instructional activities.

In order to achieve this goal, alternative support methods must be employed to ensure that no distance student is significantly inconvenienced or barred from receiving the services required. Since distance students have widely varying access methods

available to them, redundant systems should be in place for many support functions. The overall support system should address, at the least, the following areas: technical support, instructional resources, faculty development, instructional design and development, and policy changes aimed at creating an environment conducive to distance education.

5.1 Principle. A comprehensive system of technical support services should be in place to ensure the effective use of technologies in distance education programming for learners, instructors, and staff.

5.2 Principle. Faculty should have access to adequate support and development services in the areas of applied instructional technology and effective distance education methodology.

5.3 Principle. Support systems should be designed to provide "7 x 24" service for faculty and learners participating in distance education programs. This means that some level of access to support is provided 24 hours per day, seven days a week.

5.4 Principle. Regular feedback mechanisms should be designed and implemented to assess the success and failures of the various support systems created for the distance education system.

5.5 Principle. Extending the distance education mission of the institution requires policy adjustments and accommodations for supporting the distance education instructor and learners.

CONCLUSION

An Emerging Set of Guiding Principles and Practices for the Design and Development of Distance Education_ represents the collective thinking of faculty and staff about what constitutes the design and development of a quality educational experience. Although not all inclusive, it provides a foundation from which to evaluate the integration of emerging technologies and the adoption of new pedagogical strategies. The structure of three principal categories reflecting the educational process, followed by two enabling categories, further supports the premise that "good teaching is good teaching," and technology is an instructional tool.

As changing demographics and new technologies and methodologies cause educational institutions to reconsider the value of a general education within our society, these forces also force us to re-evaluate our concept of an "educational event." Time, location, and pace of study are becoming less important as indicators of quality instruction. The delivery system is secondary to the type of interactions and intellectual engagement that the system provides both the learner and the teacher. These guiding principles and practices encourage us to focus on the true mission of any educational system, creating an educational event that causes a marked and sustainable change in behavior in our learners.